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ABSTRACT

Paragraph writing mediated by imagery is richer, more flexible, and more creative than that produced by the somewhat impoverished, predictable, one-process model usually taught in composition classes. Since the writing advice given students differs considerably from the practice of professional writers, students should be given exercises that not only help them use concrete evidence or factual support for topic sentences (the one-process model) but also help them build image-producing figures to develop topic sentences (the two-process model). Analysts of language have recognized that language has an underlying substrata of imagery--what Noam Chomsky called "deep structure"--but they have never applied it specifically to the paragraph. A review of imagery schemes that could apply to paragraph development produced a list that includes repetition, regression, opposition, metaphor, implied metaphor (catachresis), representation, reduction, and allegory. Sample paragraphs from professional writing can illustrate the use of these image-producing figures and can help students become conscious of techniques that may be unconscious in the minds of professional writers. (AEA)

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A Two-Process Model of Paragraph Development

When Everyman says to Kindred, "Now show me the very effect of your mind. Will you go with me, or abide behind?" he signals the topic of my paper, structural imagery in the paragraph. Our language, of course, is overrun with expressions like "I see what you mean" or "I ask of them only that they illustrate... ." It is my contention that this imagery signals form-consciousness to the reader and that while it is important to identify the structural parts of an existing paragraph, it is more important to identify the "movements of mind" that Richard L. Larson has described as plans of organization that are directly related to patterns and habits in thinking. ("Invention Once More: A Role for Rhetorical Analysis," College English 32, 665-72) The kind of form that I will be considering here is form based upon a two-process model of language incorporating the attitude that writing mediated by imagery is richer, more flexible, and creative--a kind of visual montage that the modern reader is tuned to--than that produced by the somewhat impoverished one-process model we usually employ. And I am speaking here of the more abstract kinds of writing as well as descriptive writing. Form, as I will be using it, is to be understood as a consistently useful performance that is observably effective.

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The most obvious point to make regarding form in the paragraph is that much of the advice we give to our students differs considerably from the practice of professional writers. This fact has been illustrated again and again by the research in the field. Richard Braddock's study on the topic sentence ("The Frequency and Placement of Topic Sentences in Expository Prose, Research in the Teaching of English 8, 1974, 287-302) and Alton L. Becker's T-R-I and P-S heuristics applied to the paragraph ("A Tagmemic Approach to Paragraph Analysis," College Composition and Communication 16, 1965, 237-42) have forced upon us a change in our usual descriptive and prescriptive advice about the paragraph, and ultimately, I hope, we will be forced to change our attitudes about what is good and what is bad in the paragraphs of our students. As we observe more and more writing and as that writing moves farther and farther from the nineteenth century paragraph description, we cannot escape that change (though most available paragraph books have managed to so far).

Robert Gorrell in "Not by Nature: Approaches to Rhetoric," (English Journal 55, 1966, 409-16, 449) proposes three principles of paragraph development, in his words, "partly because they seem to me to describe accurately what happens in writing but more significantly because they seem to me to provide some practical approaches to writing and the teaching of writing." These principles

are the processes of addition, adding comments to topics; continuity, a series of commitments and responses; and selection, a series of choices among alternatives. These principles moved our studies much closer to a generative rhetoric of the paragraph, neither descriptive nor prescriptive, but offering alternative choices.

It is interesting to me, however, that no one to my knowledge has ever attempted to apply what we know about a two-process model of language to the paragraph, language that has an underlying substrate of imagery. A two-part model of language has its support in studies both intuitive and empirical, philosophical and psychological. In Philosophy in a New Key (Harvard University Press, 1942), Susanne Langer describes what she terms "presentational forms"--non-discursive visual forms capable of articulation. These forms, that are not included in a language-bound theory of mind, have a complexity that is not governed by what the mind retains from the beginning of an apperceptive act to the end of it.

Allan Paivio in Imagery and Verbal Processes (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1971) has explored the existing studies of the relationship of underlying imagery and verbal processes and concludes that certain conceptual pegs in language, both descriptive and abstract, trigger non-verbal images which help the reader to retain not the syntactic

properties of language but the semantic interpretations. This relationship is based upon the ancient theory that perception, imagination, and thought are continuous modes of experience. The study of J.S. Sachs, "Recognition of semantic, syntactic and lexical changes in sentences," (paper presented at Psychonomic Society Meetings, Chicago, Ill., October, 1967, and cited in Paivio, p. 458) indicates that in language the specific wording fades, and the meaning is stored. Paivio believes, as Frank D'Angelo has pointed out in A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishing, 1975), that it is these underlying images to which Chomsky is referring when he describes the deep structure of language. Linguistic competence and performance depend initially upon that substrate of imagery. Even abstract discourse, according to Paivio, may involve non-verbal processes at a deeper level of consciousness.

The Parisian analyst, Jacques Lacan, in Ecrits (Du Seuil, Paris, 1966, and made accessible in Samuel Ijsselling, Rhetoric and Philosophy in Conflict, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, p. 96) did some interesting work with the two-process model of language based upon Freud's condensation and displacement. Condensation, or that mechanism of dream by which certain elements are omitted and various other elements are combined to form one element leaving behind only a small part of a complex whole, and displacement, that mechanism in which one aspect of the dream is replaced by another and emphasis is moved from

an important aspect to a less important one, refer in language, according to Lacan, to what we call metonymy and metaphor. In oneiric discourse, or in discourse that has a hidden rhetorical structure, Lacan sees the use of ellipsis, pleonasm, hyperbaton or syllepsis, regression, repetition, opposition, metaphor, catachresis, and antonomasia to be the keys to the hidden or underlying structure. Viewing psychoanalysis as "a critical discipline that attempts to detect the concealed and subtle rhetorical character of whatever one says or writes," Lacan sees the Quintilian schemes and tropes as keys to a substrate which can be available to the psychoanalyst. Psychoanalysis, for Lacan, is interpretation work. Because the writer or speaker becomes involved in secondary revision--that is, one only speaks what is permissible, or in the composition class, possible--we are presented with a severely mutilated text that has met the demands of unity, connection, and intelligibility. The speaker or writer who is unable to establish a true relationship will fabricate a false one.

We are all aware of the figures that Lacan mentions when we teach sentence composition and style. I became intrigued by the notion that they might also have something to tell us about an underlying form-consciousness in the paragraph, and that they might be the key to the underlying

imagery that works beyond the level of concrete language and calls up specific images. Since Quintilian, ellipsis, repetition, and metaphor have been taught at the word and sentence level. Did they also have something to tell us about the image-producing principles of paragraph development?

I began to look over the list for the schemes that might refer to larger discourse development, that is, the paragraph. From the list of image-producing figures, I developed the following list of principles of paragraph development based upon what was observable in existing paragraphs: repetition, regression, opposition, metaphor, catachresis, representation, reduction, and allegory.

By repetition, I mean, of course, simply repeating an idea in closely related words to produce a definite image. Regression is a general statement expanded part by part. Opposition or antithesis works to give us an active conceptual peg in exploring both sides of an issue. Metaphor and catachresis, or implied metaphor, work for that same activity, and the less anticipated the metaphor, the more active the image. Representation and reduction I use in the Kenneth Burke sense, and they are the classifications of illustration in the paragraph. Representation is synecdoche or letting a part stand for a whole. Reduction is metonymy, letting a cause suggest an effect, or an effect suggest a cause.

Let me illustrate with some sample paragraphs how these image-producing figures are present in the writing of professionals. The first paragraph is from Gary Jennings' Personalities of Language (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1965):

> My mapping of the spread of the Indo-European tongues is admittedly oversimplified and presumptive; neither mass migrations nor changes in language ever proceed so smoothly. We don't know how long these processes did take, except that they must have occupied glacial ages. We don't know in precisely what order the various migrations took place, or how they might have been affected by rebuffs, checks, retreats and roundabout detours. We don't know how many elementary and intermediate changes the languages may have gone through. We can only trace backward from the numerous language twigs that still are green and from a few dead ones we can recognize as having withered from the same familial branches.

In this essentially informative paragraph, Jennings begins with his topic--that the spread of Indo-European languages that he has described is oversimplified. Immediately he uses opposition: "neither mass migrations nor changes in language ever proceed so smoothly." The next three sentences are all regression: "We don't know how long these processes did take, except that they must have occupied glacial ages. We don't know in precisely what order the various migrations took place, or how they might have been affected by rebuffs, checks, retreats and roundabout detours. We don't know how many elementary and intermediate changes the languages may have gone through." In these three

sentences also is catachresis, or implied metaphor, the metaphor of the migration of the language with the migration of the people. Finally, the paragraph closes with pure metaphor, the language tree.

In a second paragraph for illustration, from George Plimpton's The Paper Lion (Harper and Row, 1964), representation, metaphor, and repetition are at work:

> Everything fine about being a quarterback--the embodiment of his power--was encompassed in those dozen seconds or so; giving the instructions to ten attentive men, breaking out of the huddle, walking for the line, and then pausing behind the center, dawdling amidst men poised and waiting under the trigger of his voice, cataleptic, until the deliverance of himself and them to the future. The pleasure of sport was so often the chance to indulge the cessation of time itself--the pitcher dawdling on the mound, the skier poised at the top of a mountain trail, the basketball player with the rough skin of the ball against his palm preparing for a foul shot, the tennis player at set point over his opponent--all of them savoring a moment before committing themselves to action.

At the beginning of the paragraph is the descriptive passage that serves as a synecdoche for everything fine about being a quarterback: "giving the instructions to ten attentive men, breaking out of the huddle," etc. Next comes a further representation of the pleasure of sport and a repetition of the idea: "the pitcher dawdling on the mound, the skier poised at the top of the mountain trail," and so on.

Of course, abstract phrases may be meaningful in

the completely contextual sense without involving any arousal of nonverbal images, but that kind of prose is at the very least less informationally rich than the prose that I have illustrated professional writers use. We are working here with Kenneth Burke's two types of form, syllogistic progression and qualitative progression. (See Counter-Statement, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1931, 158-59.) When we teach the paragraph only as a topic sentence with supports, we are teaching syllogistic progression; the form is predictable and suggested like that of a mystery story. When we teach the image-producing figures, we teach qualitative progression as well. A statement suggests the responses that are available to follow it.

In the classroom there are a number of exercises possible for the practical application of the principles of paragraph imagery. Students can learn to pick out the use of the image-producing figures in the writing in a rhetoric reader, thereby isolating the features of a paragraph that create memorable prose. Students can be given topics and asked to repond using one of the image-producing elements. Students can be given topics and asked which elements are called for in response.

In Reflections in a Golden Eye, Carson McCullers has this to say about the mind: "The mind is like a richly woven

tapestry in which the colors are distilled from the experiences of the sense, and the design drawn from the convolutions of the intellect." We are embarrassed somehow by statements like that today. We live in an age of accountability--and that sort of romantic description of the mind is in no sense of the word "accountable" because it does not give us hard scientific proof of just which part of that "richly woven tapestry" is responsible for the experiences of the senses. I do not believe that we will ever bring the forces governing writing fully under control, but isolating the image-producing elements of the paragraph and helping our students to be aware of those elements and their availability can make conscious in the minds of our students techniques which may be long since unconscious in the minds of professional writers.